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A SHORT NOTE ON ŚRĪDHARA SVĀMIN AND BALADEVA VIDYĀBHUṢANA

(Two all-India reputed Oriya Vaiṣṇava scholars)

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Credit goes to Dr. J. N. Farquhar and Dr. S. K. De, two eminent scholars of the 20th century for throwing light on the contributions of Śrīdhara Svāmin and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana, two great Oriya Vaiṣṇava scholars, whose history is obscure. Recently my attention was directed to study the sources of history of these two scholars and below is given a short sketch of their lives.

I. Śrīdhara Svāmin

In Bengali *Viṣvakoṣa* there is a paragraph about Śrīdhara Svāmin in which his guru's name is given as Paramananda and about his *Bhāṣya* of *Bhāgavata* and *Bhagvatgītā* and a few other works. No other information has been recorded. Nothing is known about his guru.

Among the European scholars Dr. J. N. Farquhar in his work entitled "*An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*" (Oxford University Press, 1920) wrote as follows on Śrīdhara Svāmin:

"Probably about A. D. 1400 Śrīdhara Svāmin, Mahant of the Sankarite monastery Govardhana, in Puri, wrote a commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Bhāvārtha Dīpikā*, which is by far the most famous exposition of the work. He was clearly an excellent scholar, and he must have had access to a very

trustworthy tradition. He begins his commentary with the distinct statement that the great Purāṇa was not written by Vopadeva. The fact that this theory was already current proves that Śrīdhara wrote at a time considerably latter than A. D. 1300, when Vopadeva flourished. As the commentary was well-known everywhere by the end of the fifteenth century, Śrīdhara may reasonably be placed in *circa* A. D. 1400. His interpretation of the Purāṇa is advaitist, since he was a follower of Saṅkara; and since the Bhāgavata, itself tends to be monist, his *Dīpikā* is usually regarded as most authoritative" (p-297).

After Dr. Farquhar, Dr. S. K. De has written on the work of Śrīdhara Svāmin. His paper entitled *Pre-Chaitanya Vaisnavism in Bengal* which was published in *Festschrift Moriz Winternitz* pp 195f. in 1933. Dr. De has reproduced this article in his "*Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*" in his first edition of 1942 which was not consulted by me, but I have consulted the second edition of his work published by Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta in 1961. Dr. De has written on Śrīdhara Svāmin as follows:

"It appears probable, on the other hand, that Mādhavendra Purī and his disciple Iṣvara Purī were Sankarite of the same type as Śrīdhara Svāmin, who in his great commentary on the Śrīmadbhāgavata attempted to combine the Advaita teachings of Saṅkara with the emotionalism of the Bhāgavatas. Whatever may be the value of this attempt at reconciling Jñāna and Bhakti, tradition alleges that Śrīdhara's interpretation caused a great sensation in his Saṁpradāya at Benares." (pp. 17-18).

Dr. S. K. De further writes as follows on the influence of Śrīdhara at p. 23:—

"The devotional interpretations of Śrīdhara were apparently accepted by a class of devotional Sanyasins, who first laid the foundations of a Vaiṣṇava Bhakti movement in Bengal on the ultimate basis of the *Śrīmad bhāgavata*. Chaitanya, himself a Sanyāsin of this type, moulded this movement into an entirely new shape by his own practice and experience of Bhakti." (p. 17-18).

Dr. S. K. De has remarked on the date of Śrīdhara Svāmin that "as Śrīdhara refers to Vopadeva, he could not have been earlier than 1300 A. D." in a foot-note at p. 17 of his work.

The well-known Vaiṣṇava work entitled *Chaitanya charitāmṛta*, written in Bengali by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in 1615 A. D. also throws light on the influence of Śrīdhara Svāmin on Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu of Bhāgavata Purāṇa interpreted by Śrīdhara Svāmin. The Bengali verse in question is quoted below from *Antyalitā* of *Chaitanya Charitāmṛta*, Chapter 7.

“ श्रीधरस्वामी प्रसादेते भागवत जानि

जगद्गुरु श्रीधरस्वामी गुरु करि मानि ” (Antya Chap. VII)

“ I have learnt Bhāgavata through the grace of Śrīdhara Svāmin and I respect Śrīdhara Svāmin as my guru.

Along with this verse there are six other verses which praise also Śrīdhara Svāmin for his *Tīkā* of Bhāgavata.

In spite of this reference by Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in *Chaitanya Chāritāmṛta* written in 1615 A. D., the history and life of Śrīdhara Svāmin was so forgotten that Dr. Farquhar only referred to him to be the Mahanta of the Govardhana Maṭha of Puri, but Dr. S. K. De could not find a tradition about Śrīdhara Svāmin supporting Dr. Farquhar's view. Dr. Farquhar assigns a date for him about 1400 A.D. and Dr. De suggests a date after 1300 A.D.

The long gap of one hundred years about the date of Śrīdhara Svāmin does not lead us any where. This led me to investigate further and the result is recorded below. Dr. Farquhar mentions that Śrīdhara Svāmin was a *Mahanta* of the Sankarite Govardhana Maṭha at Puri, but he has not given any reference from which he got this information. On enquiry I came to know from the Bengali book entitled *Śrīkṣetra* by Sundarānanda Vidyāvinoda that there are the following six Sankar Maṭhas at Puri, namely 1. Govardhana Maṭha, 2. Saṅkarānanda Bhogavardhana Maṭha, 3. Gopālātīrtha Maṭha 4. Sivātīrtha Maṭha, 5. Mahipprakāsa Maṭha and 6. Laksmībhadrā Maṭha. Through the kind help of my friend Sri Sudhakar Pattanayak of Cuttack, I was able to see two pamphlets published by the Govardhana Maṭha in 1913 and Saṅkarānanda Bhogavardhan Maṭha in 1917. The pamphlet of the Govardhana Maṭha is entitled *Maṭhānmāya* and that of the Saṅkarānanda Bhogavardhana Maṭha is *Gurukramānmāya*. There is no reference to Śrīdhara Svāmin in *Maṭhānmāya* whereas in *Gurukramānmāya* there is a reference to Śrīdhara Svāmin who was a disciple of Rāmakṛṣṇānanda while Pratāpa Bhānu, a Gaṅga king, was ruling

in Orissa. The Āmnāya or the sacred tradition of the maṭha has been versified into Sanskrit by Pandit Jagannath Misra Tarka-Saṁkhyā-Nayatīrtha of Puri. So the Sanskrit verse is modern but the tradition is old. In the list of the Mahantas of the pamphlet there are two other references to Bhānu Deva; one was predecessor of Bhānu of the Rāmakṛṣṇānanda period and the other was a successor to him. In the genealogy of the Gaṅga kings of Orissa we find the following kings with the name of Bhānu Deva. namely (1) Bhānu Deva I (1264—1278 A.D.) (2) Bhānu Deva II (1308—1327 A.D.) (3) Bhānu Deva III (1353—1378 A.D.) and (4) Bhānu Deva IV (1414—1434 A.D.). As Śrīdhara Svāmin mentions Vopadeva who was living towards the end of the 13th century A.D. Bhānu Deva I is ruled out. My friend Shri Satyanarayan Rajaguru has very kindly informed me that the Virūḍa Prātāpa is found in the inscriptions of both Bhānu Deva II and Bhānu Deva III noted above. Thus Rāmakṛṣṇānanda either belonged to Bhānu Deva II or Bhānu Deva III period and so we may safely infer that his successor Śrīdhara Svāmin was living either during the time of Narasimha Deva III (1327—1353 A.D.) or Narasimha Deva IV (1378—1414 A.D.). From these data, it is safe to assign the date of Śrīdhara Svāmin during the latter half of the 14th century A.D. pending the discovery of any new evidence in future.

In this connection I like to quote below a Sanskrit verse current in Orissa without any authorship.

अहम् वेत्ति शुक वेत्ति व्यास वेत्ति वेत्ति न वेत्ति वा ।*

श्रीधरः सकलम् वेत्ति श्रीवृत्तिह प्रसादतः ।"

The words Aham Vetti is not correct according to the grammar and so Pandit Banambara Acharya interprets *Aham* as standing for Śiva who is attributed to be full of *ahamkāra*.

It is definite that this *udbhata* sloka was composed after the death of Śrīdhara Svāmin when his commentary on Bhāgavata was universally admired.

It may be said that before the visit of Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya in 1510 A.D. to Orissa, one Jivadeva Acharya wrote (i) *Bhakti Bhāgavata Mahākāvya* and (ii) *Bhaktivaiḥbhava Nāṭaka* which go to show that Śrīdhara Svāmin's influence was very intensive in Orissa after his death on the Bhakti cult of Bhāgavata.

* The first line of this verse is found to be quoted as the Verse no. 50 Chapter 24 of *Mādhyaṅga of Chaitanya Charitamṛta*. This indicates that the date of the verse is earlier than 1615 A.D.

Now the question arises as to the place to which Śrīdhara Svāmin belonged. Tradition in north Orissa is still current about the residence and birth-place of Śrīdhara Svāmin. Some 60 years ago Chandramohan Mahārāṇa, a resident of Remuṇā and the Headmaster of H. E. School of the Education service, wrote a paper in the *Mukura*, an Oriya monthly magazine, on the tradition of Śrīdhara Svāmin. Chandramohan Mahārāṇa wrote that Śrīdhara Svāmin's residence and birth place was at Mariagan, a village situated about 3 miles north of *Kṣira Chorā Gopīnātha* temple of Remuṇā. Remuṇā is a town situated about 5 miles west of the Balasore town, the headquarters of the Balasore district of Orissa.

According to the copper-plate of Narasimha Deva II (1278—1308) Remuṇā is mentioned as a temporary residence (*Kataka*) of the Gaṅga king Narasimha Deva II. The great tank lying near the Gopīnātha temple goes to prove that perhaps the said king dug out a tank there to provide water to the pilgrims of Jagannātha temple who used to take shelter there on their pilgrimage. There is another big tank called *Kuṭa Pokhari* near Remuṇā which was perhaps the site of the temporary capital. The antiquities of Remuṇā have not been properly studied as yet, but the extent of area goes to show that at one time it was a flourishing place. One of such pilgrims was Mādhavendra Puri who visited Remuṇā from Brindaban to Puri and also halted at Gopīnātha temple on his return journey to Brindaban from Puri according to *Chaitanya-charitāmṛta*. We find mention in this work as to how the name Gopīnātha was well-known as *Kṣirachorā Gopīnātha* since the time of Mādhavendra Puri the *grand-guru* of Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Near the village Maraigan, there are many villages belonging to the Atharva-vedī Brāhmaṇas of the *Paipalāda Sakhā* which is the source of *Gopāla-Tāpinī* and *Srī kṛṣṇa Tāpinī*, the basis of the Vaisnavism. The text of *Paipalāda Sakhā* was not known till 1958 and late Professor Durgamohan Bhattacharya who has edited the text, collected manuscripts from these villages. So it seems that Śrīdhara Svāmin was influenced not only by the Gopīnātha temple at Remuṇā, but also by the Atharva-vedins of the neighbouring villages of his residence at Maraigan. At Maraigan the descendants of Śrīdhara Svāmin have been residing still now and they are proud that they are the descendants of Śrīdhara Svāmin.

In 1963, while staying at Baripada I made correspondence with a member of the family of Śrīdhara Svāmin named

Sri Śaṣibhūṣaṇa Śatapathi. He came but due to my absence I was not lucky enough to see him. This living tradition of Śrīdhara Svāmin goes to prove that Śrīdhara Svāmin's birth-place is at Maraigan not far from Remuṇā in the Balasore district of Orissa. The history of Remuṇā and that of Gopīnātha temple there, has been so forgotten that along with it the history of Śrīdhara Svāmin and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa has also been forgotten. Like Śrīdhara Svāmin who influenced Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to initiate a new Vaiṣṇava movement, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa has been successful in giving philosophical interpretation to the Vaisnavism of Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya which developed at the great centres of Navadvīpa, Śrīkṣetra and Vṛndāvana.

II. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa

In Bengali *Viśvakōṣa* Volume 12, page 169ff there is a long account of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa about which details will be dealt with below. *Viśvakōṣa* records that Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was a famous Brāhmaṇa Pandit belonging to Bengal. (pp. 169) This statement is not correct as will be shown below. He was an Oriya.

About Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa Dr. Farquhar has written very little which is quoted below:—“(p. 311)

“At the beginning of the 18th century Baladeva wrote for the sect a *bhāṣya* on the *Vedānta Sūtra* calling it the *Govinda Bhāṣya* and giving its philosophic point of view the distinctive name *Achintya-Bhedābheda*, thus expressing that the relation between God and the soul is in the last analysis inconceivable”.

Dr. S. K. De has made several references to Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in his work noted above and at page 15 he has written that “Baladeva, a native of Orissa, belonged to the 18th century”.

Late Sundarānanda Vidyāvinoda in his Bengali book entitled Śrīkṣetra, third edition, published in Bengali *san* 1358 or 1950 A. D., has dealt with elaborately on the life of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa of which important features are noted below:

“Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was born in the 18th century A. D. in a village near Remuṇā of the Balasore district. No time about his birth is known definitely. He wrote in Śaka 1658 (1764 A. D.) a *ṭikā* on Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Stavamālā*. In the footnote he writes that in the *Tikā* of *Utkalikā Vallari* of *Stavamālā* the date of *Tikā* was mentioned.”

“Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa studied grammar, poetics etc., from a famous Pandit on the other side of Chilka lake. Then he studied *Nyāya* and *Veda* and went to Mysore to study *Vedānta*. At this time he was initiated by the Tatvavādins and argued with many Pandits and came to stay at the Tatvavādin Maṭha at Puri. After sometime he was initiated by Rādhā Dāmodara, a *prāṣiṣya* of Rasikāṇḍa Deva Gosvāmin and studied *Saṁ Sandarbha*. He obtained the title of *Vidyā bhūṣaṇa* at the Gāltā conference at Jaipur where he composed *Govindabhāṣya*. Others say that he learnt *Bhāgavata* from Viāvanātha Chakravarti. × × × Afterwards Baladeva became *Sanyāsin* and was known as *Ekānti-Govinda Dāsa*.

I was interested about Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa for a long time but I was not successful in getting any authentic information from various persons of Orissa and Bengal and also from the members of the Mahanta family of Gopiballabhapur lying just outside the border of Mayurbhanj in the Midnapore district of Bengal. The Mahanta family of Gopiballabhapur are the descendants of Prabhu Rasikāṇḍa Deva Gosvāmin the first disciple of Prabhu Śyāmānanda Deva Gosvāmin; thus all the disciples of the Mahanta family of Gopiballabhapur are known as the *Śyāmānanda-Saṁpradāya* to which Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa belonged. A friend of mine named Shri Kulamani Mahanti, a devout vaiṣṇava of Baripada, went to Brindaban on pilgrimage in 1962 and I requested him to collect the traditions about Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa from Brindaban and he kindly gave me a note which seemed to be authentic. In this account I came to know about the Gāltā conference where Baladeva propounded his theory of *Achintyabhedābheda* on *Brahmasūtra*. He also gave me a list of works of Baladeva. Then I got four books printed by Bhaktivinoda Āśrama of Berhampore of the Ganjam district of Orissa in which short account of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was printed, but the dates given there are found to be inaccurate. Then I requested my friend Shri Lalita Prasād Dutta, son of Bhaktivinoda Thakur, about the account of Baladeva, and Shri Lalitāprasāda, a devout Vaisnava now, was very kind to send me the account of life of Baladeva published in 1885 in the *Sajjana-Toṣiṇī* magazine edited by Bhaktivinoda Thakur. This account of Baladeva was written in Bengali by late Viśvambharānanda Deva Gosvāmin, a very learned man of Gopiballabhapur. The account published in books from Berhampore in Ganjam states that Baladeva was *Khaṇḍāyata* by caste before he was initiated into sanyāsin and no evidence was given as regards its authenticity. In other respects the account of Oriya books is similar to that of Viśvambharānanda Deva Gosvāmin written some

80 years ago and published in *Sajjana-Tosiñi*. Visvāmbharānanda was a cousin of the then Mahanta of Gopiballabhapur and Baladeva belonged to the Śyāmānanda *Sampradāya* of Śrīkṛṣṇa Chaitanya sect. It seems that this account is very trustworthy. From this account it is known that Baladeva's residence and birth-place was a village near Remuṇā and after initiation into Sanyāsīn he studied Sanskrit at Puri and also from a Pandit at Parikud in the Chilka lake. Then he went to Brindaban where he came in contact with Viṣvanātha Chakravarti and other learned Vaisnava Sanyāsīn. While staying somewhere in *Vraja* it so happened that the four *Sampradāya* Vaiṣṇavas of Southern India came to Gāltā near Jaipur, the capital of the then Jaipur kingdom of Rajputana, and objected to the worship of Rādhā with Kṛṣṇa. Sawai Jai Singh the flounder of the Jaipur capital city in 1728 could not reply to the satisfaction of the Southern Vaiṣṇavas and as a result he was compelled to remove the image of Rādhā from the Govindaji temple and sent word to Brindaban Sanyāsīns to come and reply and satisfy the Southern Vaiṣṇavas, to Gāltā temple. Upon this Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was deputed by the Śrīkṛṣṇa-Chaitanya *Sampradāya* Vaiṣṇavas of Brindaban to meet with the opponents at Gāltā. Baladeva heard all arguments of the opponents and remained quiet and begged permission to allow him one month's time to produce necessary literature to convince them. Within a period of one month, while staying at the Govindaji's temple, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa wrote out three *Bhāṣyas* called *Govinda-bhāṣya* of *Brahmasutra*, *Bhagvatgīta* and *Daṣopaniṣad* establishing *Achintyabhedābheda* theory of Vedānta which was accepted by all opponent *Sampradāyas*. After this the image of Rādhā was deified and the worship of Rādhākṛṣṇa was established with all the Vaiṣṇava *Sampradāyas* of India.

In none of these accounts we get the date of Gāltā Conference which is traditionally recorded. So we are not sure of its date. In this connection the history of the Jaipur State dispells all doubt.

Jai Singh of Jaipur succeeded at Amber in 1699 A.D. He got the title of Sawāi (One and one-fourth) from the Moghul Darbar and was known as Sawāi Jai Singh II of Jaipur. He transferred the capital to Jaipur city in 1728 A. D. The hillock called Gāltā is situated within a short distance of Jaipur city which was chosen as the temple site of Govindji. Sawāi Jai Singh ruled up to 1743 A. D. So the date of Gāltā Conference may be safely assigned to a period of 5 years from 1735—1740 A. D.

when Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa was in the prime of youth, say about 35 years old. He composed the *Tīkā* of *Utkalikā-Vallari* in 1765 A. D. Viśvambharānanda Deva Gosvāmin wrote that in 1885 there were men who saw Baladeva. If we accept the age of the persons about 100, Baladeva was living a long life about 90 years from 1705 to 1795 A. D.

Baladeva wrote *Tīkā* and *Bhāṣya* of works which is numbered twenty-four. The list of works is given below:—

1. Govinda Bhāṣya with *Tīkā* of *Brahmasūtra*.
2. Govinda Bhāṣya with *Tīkā* of *Daśopaniṣad*.
3. Govinda Bhāṣya with *Tīkā* of *Bhagvatgītā*.
4. Govinda Bhāṣya with *Tīkā* of *Viṣṇusahasranāma*.
5. *Tīkā* of *Gopāla Tāpinī*.
6. *Tīkā* of *Bhāgavat* (Vaiṣṇava-nandinī of 10th Skandha)
7. *Siddhānta Ratna*
8. *Siddhānta Darpaṇa*.
9. *Kāvya Kaustubha*.
10. *Sahitya Kaumudī*.
11. *Prameya Muktaṅgalī*.
12. *Tīkā* of *Tatva Sandharva*.
13. *Tīkā* of *Utkalikāvallārī* (Stavamālā)
14. *Tīkā* of *Nāṭaka Chandrika*,
15. *Tīkā* of *Bhaktirasamṛta Sindhu*.
16. *Tīkā* of *Lalita Mādhava*.
17. *Tīkā* of *Vidagdha Mādhava*.
18. *Tīkā* of *Stavāvalī*.
19. *Vedānta syamantaka*.
20. *Vyākaraṇa Kaumudī*.
21. *Pada Kaustubha*.
22. *Samkṣepa Bhagavatāmṛta tippaṇī*
23. *Chhānda Kaustuba*.
24. *Sri Śyamanda-Śataka-tīkā*.